



Norwalk Virus

What is Norwalk virus?

Norwalk virus is one of the Noroviruses that cause gastrointestinal (stomach and digestive) illness. Norwalk virus infection occurs occasionally in only one or a few people or it can be responsible for large outbreaks, such as in long-term care facilities.

Where did Norwalk virus come from?

Norwalk virus was first identified during an outbreak of “stomach flu” in Norwalk, Ohio in 1972.

Who gets Norwalk virus?

Norwalk virus infects people of all ages worldwide. It may, however, be more common in adults and older children.

How does someone get Norwalk virus?

Norwalk virus is spread from person to person via stool, but some evidence suggests that the virus is spread through the air during vomiting. Outbreaks have been linked to sick food handlers, ill health care workers, cases in facilities such as nursing homes spreading to other residents, and contaminated shellfish and water contaminated with sewage. The virus is generally spread from person-to-person, but some evidence suggests that the virus is spread through the air during vomiting.

What are the symptoms of Norwalk virus?

Serious illness rarely occurs. The most common symptoms include nausea, vomiting, and stomach cramps. Diarrhea may occasionally accompany vomiting. Fever is usually low grade or absent. Infected people generally recover in 1-2 days.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

The incubation period for Norwalk virus is 1-2 days.

How is Norwalk virus infection diagnosed?

Laboratory diagnosis is difficult but there are tests that can be performed in the State Public Health Lab in situations where there are multiple cases. Diagnosis is often based on the combination of symptoms and the short time of the illness.

What is the treatment for Norwalk virus infection?

No specific treatment is available. People who become dehydrated might need to be rehydrated by taking liquids by mouth. Occasionally patients may need to be hospitalized to receive intravenous fluids.

How can Norwalk virus be prevented?

While there is no vaccine for Norwalk virus, there are precautions people should take:

- Wash hands with soap and warm water after using the bathroom and after changing diapers
- Wash hands with soap and warm water before preparing or eating any food
- Cook all shellfish thoroughly before eating
- Wash raw vegetables before eating
- Dispose of sewage in a sanitary manner
- Food handlers with symptoms of Norwalk-like virus should not prepare or touch food
- Health care workers should stay home if they have symptoms of Norwalk-like virus

For specific concerns about Norwalk virus, call the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, Bureau of Communicable Disease Control at 603-271-4496 or 800-852-3345 x4496. For further information, refer to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at www.cdc.gov or the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services website at www.dhhs.state.nh.us/DHHS/BCDCS.